Without help he struggled back to his feet and stood there swaying, looking as if he would fall again if anyone breathed. He stood squarely between Goren and the guard at the door, and Nadia knew he must be moved if any of them were to escape. She was afraid to risk even a whisper, and from the lightless stare that ignored them all she was afraid they might have damaged his mind. T'serek's face was almost as pale as Spock's, and Nadia never knew if it was realization that the Vulcan blocked Goren's view of the guard, or only personal concern that prompted him to say.

"You need rest, sir--"

Spock followed his gesture and took one halting step toward the wall. Goren brought his hand from under the bedcover and played a ruby ray over the guard. It left him standing, but his chest was motionless and he didn't move again as Goren rolled out of the bed, fumbled under it, and pushed it aside. It moved easily, swinging wide to reveal a slide tube underneath. The sleek crystal sides of the tube curved away into shadow.

It was Goren who spoke to Spock. "We must escape now, First Officer."

For a terrible moment Nadia thought Spock wasn't going to answer, but the bleak stare changed with a great effort to comprehension and he drew a deep breath.

"I--have--no desire--to remain," he answered. "Let the security team go first."

With no further command, T'serek stepped away into the dark, followed by Hillis and Craven. Clement sat on the edge and tried to start slowly, but he disappeared as rapidly as the guards had, and Sunderson, with a fearful glance at the door didn't hesitate to follow him. It was Nadia's turn then, and the drop was steeper, farther and faster than she was ready for, but the tube sloped up at the end and by the time she arrived, T'serek and his men were fielding bodies and setting them aside as if they'd made a career of it. The Ixmahx leader followed Nadia and Spock followed him.

"Let me lead," Goren said. "This is a maze, in case we are followed."

"They can find us anyway with sensors." That was Clement.

"They will not use such devices, nor will we use power to escape," said Goren in the dark. "This way."

They stumbled after him in the dark, jostling each other, brushing against the walls, but it was not long until Nadia was aware of a current of fresher air moving against her face, and then she felt a change in the footing. The floor shifted, upsetting her balance.

"We are on a raft, gentlebeings. If all are present I will cast off the rope."

"Craven? Hillis?" T'serek's men confirmed their presence. Nadia called for Clement and Sunderso and the Speaker said, "First Officer?"

"I am here," the Vulcan answered.

There was a small splash as something fell into the unseen water beneath them, then a dull thud as the wood of the raft struck something. For a moment it seemed that they had not moved, and then someone shifted places, and the raft dipped to the movement. Goren lifted a glowing globe from its hiding place in a chest and they could see that they were floating out on dark water, past the walls of a cave or canyon. There was only dark above them.

"For a short time we can have light and speak freely. There are also provisions here and I do not recall that anything but samsi was poisonous to the diplomats of the Federation, so I think you can eat and drink safely. There is water and wine and some few medical supplies. Those I do not know that I can share with your First Officer." The Ixmahx was looking with concern at Spock. The Vulcan had resumed his stony stare at nothing, and T'serek moved forward into the light. He spoke respectfully and reasonably, as if he were addressing an unstable child, but his voice was firm.

"Your uniform is soaked with blood, sir. You'd better let me wash it out and see if we can't stop the bleeding."

Balefires showed in the Vulcan's eyes for a moment at even that light coercion, but T'serek stood his ground and his gray eyes held nothing but compassion. Spock had no intention, ever, of revealing the full extent of his injuries, but he realized that a refusal to let them tend him now would not further that purpose. Also the chill of the cave was pulling down his body temperature, increasing the urge to curl into a fetal ball and go deep in the healing trance. Which he must not do. He knew humans. They would try "to make him comfortable" and discover what must not be known.

He let T'serek ease his blue science tunic and black undershirt over his head and accepted the wine the Ixmahx leader offered. Nadia interferred when T'serek would have sponged the bleeding cuts with river water.

"No. You don't know what's in that. Speaker, the wine is less likely to cause infection." T'serek made no move to take the bottle the Speaker offered, and Nadia moved in. "This will hurt, Mr. Spock, but it won't take long." She poured the wine over his wrists first, and then over his back. The Vulcan stiffened, and T'serek, wringing the water from the black undershirt twisted it into shreds.

"If you want to do something useful," she said levelly, "give me your undershirts. He's going to need warmth. Put them together somehow so we don't have to move him more than necessary."

T'serek saw what she meant, and put the other two shirts on over his own, waiting until she had accepted a bandage from Goren and wrapped Spock from underarm to waist. When she was ready, he took off the layered shirts, still warm from his body, and eased Spock into them, with his own uniform tunic on top. He wrung Spock's tunic out--gently--and eased into it.

"I'll dry this out."

"Fine. Now, Beth? Come here. Lie down as close to Mr. Spock as you can, with your back to him --spoon fashion." Without question, Sunderson detached herself from Clement's protective clasp and moved to obey. "Now you, Mr. Spock. Cuddle up to Beth. We're going to keep you warm for a while."

"That is not necessary."

"It is necessary, Mr. Spock. I can see your breath on the air, and the temperature gradient between your body and the environment is greater than ours. Rest and warmth are your only weapons against shock. If you want to command this mission, you must rest now." As gently as she could, Nadia pushed him into the appropriate position, ignoring the iron rigidity of every muscle. "Beth